DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 293 RC 014 471

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TITLE A Research Report of Small/Rural School Districts in Iowa Compared to School Districts of Similiar Size Nationwide.
PUB DATE 17 Nov 83
NOTE 9p.; For related documents, see ED 228 013, ED 231 573, ED 231 583, and RC 014 470-479.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Administrators; Comparative Analysis; Courses; *Curriculum; Declining Enrollment; Educational Finance; Elementary Secondary Education; Extracurricular Activities; Profiles; Rural Schools; *School Districts; School Size; School Statistics; *Small Schools; State Surveys; Student Teacher Ratio; *Superintendents; *Teachers; Teacher Salaries
IDENTIFIERS *Iowa

ABSTRACT

Data gathered during 1982-83 are used to compare 41 small/rural K-12 Iowa school districts (900 students or fewer) to 642 similar districts nationwide. In Iowa, 307 qualifying districts (70.7% of all public school districts), enrolling 154,130 students, were identified; 4,125 districts nationwide qualified. A questionnaire mailed to superintendents of 45 randomly-selected Iowa districts and 816 randomly-selected districts nationwide yielded respective return rates of 91.1% and 78.7%. A 3-page table compares data from the Iowa and national surveys in sections on the district, superintendent, teachers, student performance, and school programs. For example, superintendents are compared in terms of average age (Iowa: 47.4, national: 47.1); percent holding master's as highest degree (31.7%, 55.4%); percent holding education specialist degree (56.1%, 31.5%); percent holding doctorate (12.2%, 13.1%); average tenure as superintendent, in years (7.5, 8.5); percent reporting annual salary in excess of $35,000 (43.9%, 37.4%); percent of full-time superintendents (61%, 75.8%); percent of superintendent/principal combinations (36.6%, 20.9%); and percent who worked for the district prior to appointment as superintendent (18.1%, 29.4%). (MH)

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A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN IOWA COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILIAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

A Report Prepared for the
Iowa State Department of Education
November 17, 1983

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IOWA

A descriptive report of K-12 public school districts in Iowa enrolling 900 students or less compared to nationwide research findings for rural school districts of similiar size. Forty-one districts were surveyed in Iowa; 642 districts were surveyed in the national study.

The study gathered data related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs, and student performance. Data was collected during the 1982-83 school year.

A RESEARCH REPORT OF SMALL/RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN IOWA COMPARED TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SIMILAR SIZE NATIONWIDE

by
Bruce O. Barker and Ivan D. Muse

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, comparatively few educators have taken an interest in the strengths and challenges of America's small/rural schools, despite the fact that almost one-third of America's youngsters attend schools classified as rural (REA News, 1982). With the decline in school consolidation and the current population shift to non-metropolitan areas (Beal, 1975), it is clearly evident that rural schools will continue to play a significant role in the future educational development of a large segment of our society. Currently, very little data are available about rural school systems in our society. This is particularly true of K-12 systems enrolling less than 1,000 students (Nachtigal, 1979).

The purpose of this report is to present major findings of K-12 rural school districts in Iowa with those of a nationwide study completed by Barker (1983), in which descriptive data were collected on K-12 and/or 1-12 rural school systems enrolling 900 students or less. The findings were gathered during the 1982-83 academic year.

METHOD

Using the Education Directory, Fall 1980: Local Education Agencies as a reference, a hand count was made of all K-12 and 1-12 public school districts in the United States which enroll 900 students or less. Of the nation's 15,601 public districts, 4,125 (26.4 percent) were identified as qualifying K-12 or 1-12 systems. In Iowa, 307 qualifying districts were identified. These districts represented 70.7 percent of the state's 434

operating public school districts and enrolled 154,130 students.

Questionnaires were mailed to superintendents of 816 randomly selected districts in the nationwide study. Completed questionnaires were returned from 642 districts (78.7 percent). The same questionnaire was mailed to 45 districts in Iowa, of which 41 responded (91.1 percent). The questionnaire posed questions related to the rural district, the school superintendent, the teachers, school programs and student performance.

FINDINGS

A comparison of the major findings in Iowa with those of the national study are reported in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

Iowa is one of the leading states in the nation in relation to the number of rural districts which make up the state's public school system. It is clearly evident that the operation and management of the small/rural district poses challenges and rewards, in many ways, uniquely different from those of a large urban district, and even many larger rural districts. It is hoped that the information presented herein will assist Iowa educators, and others interested in education, to more knowledgeably enhance the strengths and address the needs of the small/rural districts within the state.

TABLE I

COMPARISON OF RESERACH FINDINGS ON K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN IOWA AND THOSE NATIONWIDE, ENROLLING 900 STUDENTS OR LESS. 1983.

Variable	Iowa	Nation
The Rural District		
1. Average student enrollment per district	434	436
2. Average number of schools per district	1.8	2.4
3. Average student enrollment per school	194.4	188.5
4. Average geographical size of district in square miles	180	245
5. Percent of student's bussed to school	61.3	64.4
6. Mean farthest one-way distance students bussed (miles)	16.1	19.0
7. Percent of districts reporting receipt of state aid or funding for small school districts	5.0	24.2
8. Average dollar amount of last bond issue	$826,488	$716,000
9. Percent of districts passing last bond issue	86.8	87.5
10. Percent of districts reporting declining enrollments	65.0	36.2
The Superintendent		
1. Average age of superintendent	47.4	47.1
2. Percent of superintendents holding master's as highest degree	31.7	55.4
3. Percent of superintendents holding Ed. Specialist degree	56.1	31.5
4. Percent of superintendents holding doctorate degree	12.2	13.1
5. Average tenure as superintendent (years)	7.5	8.5
6. Percent of superintendents reporting annual salary in excess of $35,000	43.9	37.4
7. Percent of full-time superintendents	61.0	75.8
8. Percent of superintendent/principal combinations	36.6	20.9
9. Percent of superintendents who worked for district prior to appointment as superintendent	18.1	29.4
The Teachers		
1. Average number of elementary teachers in district	14.1	14.4
2. Average number of secondary teachers in district	17.2	15.7
3. Average teacher/student ratio	1:13.8	1:14.5
4. Percent teacher turnover (1982-83)	8.5	8.6
5. Mean beginning teacher salary (1982-83)	$12,023	$12,492
6. Mean top teacher salary (1982-83)	$19,397	$20,506
7. Mean current teacher salary (1982-83)	$15,731	$16,377

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Iowa	Nation
8. Average number of "steps" to reach top of salary schedule	14.0	14.5
9. Average number of different subject preparations for secondary teachers	3.4	3.5
Student Performance		
1. Mean number of graduating seniors	39.3	34.5
2. Percent of graduating seniors recognized as National Merit Exam Finalists	1.4	1.0
3. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 25 or above on American College Test (ACT Exam)	11.4	7.5
4. Percent of graduating seniors achieving scores of 1100 or above on Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT Exam)	1.2	2.6
5. Percent of graduating seniors going on to college	39.9	38.6
6. Percent of graduating seniors going to technical school	18.7	14.1
School Programs		
1. Percent of districts exploying either full or part-time, the following resource personnel:		
Special Education	97.6	86.6
School Counselor	95.1	79.4
School Psychologist	14.6	33.8
School Nurse	68.3	45.1
Librarian/Media Specialist	85.5	80.9
Adult Education Director	31.7	22.0
Community Education Director	7.3	7.8
Vocational Education Director	14.6	22.0
2. Percent of districts offering the following sports programs:		
Football	85.4	69.2
Basketball	100	100
Baseball	100	55.4
Softball	100	37.1
Volleyball	70.7	65.7
Cross Country Track	36.6	23.3
Soccer	100	7.0
Wrestling	51.2	25.2
Track and Field	100	78.7
Golf	56.1	22.4
Tennis	2.4	16.3
Swimming	2.4	3.2
Gymnastics	4.9	5.9

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Iowa	Nation
3. Percent of districts offering the following courses as a part of their curriculum:		
Spanish	58.5	41.8
German	9.7	9.7
French	29.3	18.9
Calculus	51.2	35.9
Chemistry	87.8	79.4
Computer Science	75.6	60.3
Electronics	31.7	13.0
Vocational Agriculture	58.5	63.1
Physics	85.3	67.7

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